

DoD Wants to Accelerate Indirect Fires Technology

JOE BURLAS

WASHINGTON (Army News Service, May 16, 2002)—The Department of Defense wants the Army to lobby Congress to transfer all the funding for the recently canceled Crusader howitzer program to accelerate a number of current indirect fires research and development programs, according to a top DoD official.

Failure to do so could put the programs at risk because the Army plans to field its Future Combat System (FCS) during the same timeframe the indirect fires programs are currently scheduled for production, said Michael Wynne, Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, during a May 15 Pentagon press briefing.

Those programs include upgrades to the currently fielded Paladin 155 mm howitzer, a family of satellite-guided Excalibur artillery munitions, Net Fires System, High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System, and a lightweight 155 mm howitzer.

"We want the Army, and we are recommending to the Army, that they package up and recommend to Congress that we accelerate precision munitions and rockets, as we don't want those ultimately competing with the Future Combat System, but basically enhancing the Future Combat System," Wynne said.

With the exception of the lightweight howitzer, the programs are scheduled for production and fielding early next decade—about the same time the Army plans to have its first FCS rolling off the assembly line. The lightweight howitzer is already in production by a Great Britain defense contractor and in use by that country's military.

Accelerated funding for the programs would mean they would be produced between 2006 and 2009—thus, lessening the chance of budget crunch with the FCS in later years, Wynne said.

The Principal Deputy said the indirect fires programs support DoD's vision to have more precise fires on the battlefield with systems that can be deployed easier than current systems. He gave the example of using three Excalibur rounds to take out a training center in the middle of a city versus 150 rounds of what is currently available to do the same job. In addition to a smaller logistics tail to supply ammo, precision also means less collateral damage, he said.

Some of the funding already spent on the Crusader will be recaptured, Wynne said, as DoD plans to migrate some of the proven technologies it developed into Paladin upgrades.

"We are hoping that all \$9 billion (originally slated for Crusader development and fielding) will not only be returned to the Army, but it will be returned to Army artillery," Wynne said. "And we have asked the Army if they would come forward with a plan to essentially reinvigorate all of these programs, accelerating them, and maintain control and monetary spending authority."

Army Secretary Thomas E. White was given a May 20 deadline to return with an Army artillery modernization program that meets the DoD vision when he was informed of the DoD decision to cancel the Crusader May 7.

Editor's Note: This information is in the public domain at <http://www.dtic.mil/armylink/news>.